

Sexual Blackmail

Judging from Washington's perennial sex scandals, power truly is the ultimate aphrodisiac – to paraphrase that seventies-epoch Casanova, Henry Kissinger, in a slightly different context. For young wonks and old goats alike, political prowess tends to breed hubris and hormones.

Not surprisingly, then, in the nation's pulsing capital, the fine art of sexual blackmail has what you might call "a history."

The pioneering figure of Washington "sexmail" was that creepiest of peeping G-men, J. Edgar Hoover. Thanks to his infamous sex files, which contained dirt on just about everyone in Washington short of his shoeshine boy, Hoover managed to dominate the capital (and eight presidents) for nearly half a century.

Not surprisingly, Hoover's busiest period came while John F. Kennedy occupied the White House and its many bedrooms. By several accounts, when rumors were rampant that Kennedy was going to pinkslip the aging, annoying FBI chief, Hoover put his plenary Kennedy files to work, thereby saving his own hide. With an obsession more than verging on the pathological, Hoover had bugged JFK's legion love nests and tapped the princess phones of assorted Kennedy playmates, including mob moll Judith Campbell Exner and superstarlet Marilyn Monroe – whose bedroom was purportedly heavily trafficked by both Kennedy brothers.

The bug-eyed Hoover also glommed onto in-flight tapes of Jack and actress Angie Dickinson summitting in the boudoir of a chartered aircraft. Typically playing both sides against the middle, Hoover leaked info to the tabloid press about an old Kennedy affair with a senate secretary and about Kennedy's rumored former marriage, and then "put Kennedy in his debt by supplying background for the *Newsweek* rebuttal," according to journalist Anthony Summers.

When it came to recording Jack and Bobby's compromising positions, Hoover had company. The Mafia and Jimmy Hoffa also managed to plant electronic bedroom ears in Marilyn Monroe's inner sanctum, especially at roue actor and Kennedy in-law Peter Lawford's beach house.

Hoover used the same tactics in his vendetta against Martin Luther King, Jr., bugging the civil rights leader's tryst spots with assorted paramours, spreading untrue gossip that King was a "switch-hitter," even marshaling surveillance photographs of King in the same room as a known – GASP – homosexual. Transcripts were leaked to the press, but the media didn't bite.

Hoover even had a bimbo file on Richard Nixon, of all the unlikely party animals. As Anthony Simmers reports in his revisionist Hoover biography, *Official and Confidential*, while Nison was vice president, he met a young Hong Kong travel guide named Marianna Liu. Convinced that Liu was a spy for communist China (a "Chicom"), the CIA had British intelligence train its infrared camera lenses on Nixon's bedroom window during his visits to Hong Kong. Liu and Nixon swore to Summers that there was never any sex, but Hoover was described as reading the Nixon-Chicom file "gleefully" and showing it to Dick before he became president.

Never one to let "evidence" get in the way of salacious innuendo, Hoover later came up with a report claiming that future Watergate boys H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and Dwight Chapin were homosexual lovers. This was in 1969, before Watergate, and Hoover's source, an unidentified bartender, was claiming that the three were whooping it up at homosexual parties in the Watergate hotel. Of course, it wasn't true, and as Ehrlichman told Summers, "I came to think that Hoover did this to show his claws, or ingratiate himself to Nixon – probably both."

In Washington, what goes around comes around, and Hoover's actual homosexuality was hardly a secret among his numerous enemies. Mob boss Meyer Lansky liked to boast that he "fixed that son of a bitch" Hoover, purportedly by acquiring graphic photos of Hoover fellating his lifelong companion, Clyde Tolson. According to Summers, by the late

1940s there were also pictures of Hoover vamping as a closet drag queen. Even that quintessential CIA garbologist, counterspy catcher James Jesus Angleton was in on the act, purportedly having his mits on incriminating Hoover sex pics.

Blackmail or not, the mob's sway over Hoover was enormous: Publicly, the all-American, morally unimpeachable lingerie-wearing FBI director refused to admit that the Mafia even existed.

Hoover went to his grave more than two decades ago, taking his voluminous "personal and confidential" sex files with him. Of course they mysteriously vanished, giving rise to assorted conspiracy theories, including the possibility that Hoover loyalists destroyed them, that the CIA snatched them up, and even that Nixon's Watergate Plumbers made a bungled attempts to get their hot little mits on the explosive cache.

So, with Hoover out of the picture, is sexual extortion in Washington merely a historical idiosyncrasy, like Hoover, and the Kennedys, the product of a more reckless era?

Well, sexual blackmail may have a more enduring place in Washington politics than we tend to suspect. More than one vice investigator in Washington believes that mob-controlled call girls, intelligence operatives, and even Washington lobbyists have long run an underground racket aimed at sexually compromising Congress and the administration. Conspiracy researcher Peter Dale Scott calls it "an ongoing, highly organized, and protected operation." Scott, a former Canadian diplomat and professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, goes so far as to suggest that Washington's sex syndicate, exploited by intelligence spooks and the mob, has "driven the major scandals of Washington since at least the beginning of the Cold War."

Apparently, behind every good political scandal is a prostitute. Scott isn't alone in this thinking. According to Scott, "a retired Washington detective, one who played a small but important role in Watergate," believes that mob pimps and bigwig lobbyists use pricey call girls to put the squeeze on key officials. This is apparently a reference to Carl Shoffler, incidentally the arresting police officer who slapped cuffs on the Watergate burglars.

During a 1982 investigation into the use of "drugs and sexual activity to lobby congressmen," Shoffler did indeed advise congressional investigators to look into a male prostitution ring that serviced Capitol Hill. The veteran police detective believed that the sex ring might be linked to a high-flying Washington lobbyist, Robert Keith Cray, who had more than a few connections to CIA folk. According to Peter Dale Scott, some Washington investigators also suspected that the gay sex ring was connected to D.C. crime boss Joe "the Possum" Nesline.

Unfortunately, the congressional probe petered out before it got anywhere. Summing up the untested Libido-gate hypothesis, however, one of the congressional investigators put it this way to author Susan Trento: "If a lobbyist wants to use hookers to influence legislation, there's a pool of talent he draws from. There are certain madams in town that they make connections with. By simple logic, if you're in the business of influencing people with male prostitutes of kids, there has to be that supply chain.... [If] we start to identify some of the clients, it's possible we could find the suppliers for intelligence, organized crime, and lobbyists." In other words, follow the honey.

Former (and fugitive) CIA officer Frank Terpil had no compunction about identifying one such client, his former employer. Terpil told investigative author Jim Hougan that CIA-run sexual blackmail setups were common in Washington during the Watergate years. Terpil fingered his former partner, Ed Wilson, as the facilitator of one such CIA operation. Terpil claimed that Wilson ran the CIA mantrap from Korean agent Tong Sun Park's George Town Club, the Korean intelligence front that figured in the 1970s Koreagate scandal.

"Historically," Terpil explained, "one of Wilson's agency jobs was to subvert members of both houses [of Congress] by any means necessary.... Certain people could be easily coerced by living out their sexual fantasy in the flesh.... A remembrance of these occasions [was] permanently recorded via selected cameras."

Of course, we should note the Terpil hasn't offered any proof to back up that claim, and ex-CIA officers – not least of all, ones who have been convicted in absentia for terrorist activities – aren't celebrated for their candor. On the other hand, sexual blackmail was indeed a favorite CIA method of "turning" foreign agents or otherwise compromising them to do Uncle Sam's bidding. Considering all of the Agency's illegal doings on domestic soil during the last four decades, Terpil's story certainly seems plausible. Interestingly, Robert Keith Gray, the omnipresent superlobbyist whose name came up during the 1982 gay sex ring investigation, also pops into the George Town Club-Terpil milieu. Gray, who (coincidentally or not) gravitates toward spy nests, was the club's first overseer and also a director at Terpil's firm, Consultants International, a notorious CIA proprietary front.

And speaking of strange coincidences, it might be nothing more than evidence that networking is key in D.C., but Terpil's and Korean lobbyist Park's names turned up a few years earlier in the trick book of a cathouse madam linked to yet another famous scandal, the biggest scandal of all: Watergate.

The theory that the Watergate affair sprang, unintentionally, from the bosom of a political sex ring was first proposed by journalist Jim Hougan in his book, *Secret Agenda*.

The madam, Heidi Rikan, worked out of the Washington's posh Columbia Plaza apartment building, located across the street from the Watergate office complex. Hougan suggests that Rikan's call-girl ring may have been "either a CIA operation or the target of a CIA operation."

Briefly, Hougan's hypothesis is this: The Columbia Plaza girls were servicing a very interesting political clientele: Democratic muckamucks who placed their orders for companionship from a phone inside the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate building. Discovering this fruitful setup, Nixon's henchmen decided to target the Democratic fornicators. But in doing so, they stood a good chance of exposing the heavy breather already bugging the phone lines: the CIA. Ergo, the CIA's moles in the White House (allegedly superpatriotic conspirators James McCord and E. Howard Hunt) were forced to sabotage the Watergate break-ins in order to protect the CIA's highly illegal sex sting from Nixon's overeager burglars.

An illegal CIA sexpionage gambit unintentionally triggering the downfall of Richard Nixon? Say it ain't so!

Does the sexpionage industry go back even further in history than the babes of Watergate? Conspiracy theorist-emeritus Peter Dale Scott is game enough to hazard an affirmative. Employing the semiotics of conspiracy research – wherein names connect to other names, dates, and misdeeds, creating a tableau of suspicion that is usually intriguing, if not always conclusive – Scott has connected the dots.

Most interestingly, the Watergate madam, Heidi Rikan, was a girlfriend of mobster Joe "the Possum" Nesline, whose alleged connection to the Capitol Hill gay sex scandal a decade late aroused the suspicions of Washington detectives.

Assorted boyfriends and former husbands of both Rikan and her sometime roommate, Mo Biner (who married key Watergate figure John Dean, which makes Mo a pivotal character, according to scandal revisionists), were associated with the Quorum, an early 1960s "swingles" club run by Bobby Baker, a former aide to Lyndon Johnson. Scott surmises that all roads led to Baker's club for a reason: the Quorum functioned a lot like the mob-and-intelligence-infested sex traps of the 1970s.

It was Bobby Baker who introduced President Kennedy to an East German bombshell named Ellen Rometsh, whom JFK, true to form, promptly bedded. Scott speculates that J. Edgar Hoover leaked word of this international indiscretion to the press. Whether or not Hoover was behind the leaks, they nearly ignited a global scandal. That's because JFK's nubile Valkyrie also happened to be sleeping with a Soviet diplomat, a coincidence that, if revealed, wouldn't have served Kennedy well at the height of the Cold War. The threat of a "bimbo eruption" with international implications forced Bobby Kennedy into scandal-kibosh mode.

Scott notes that the JFK-Rometsch peccadillo paralleled the scandalous 1962 affair that toppled British war minister John Profumo. Profumo publicly confessed to romping with Christine Keller, a party doll/prostitute working for sexual procurer Stephen Ward. That scandal proved doubly damaging to Profumo because Keller was simultaneously servicing, yes, a Soviet diplomat. And more recent revelations have disclosed that the British intelligence agency MI5 “had been using the Stephen Ward sex ring for some time to compromise the Soviet agent.” Scott wonders, did MI5 set out to compromise Profumo as well? Did the hyperlibidinous JFK blunder into a similar sex trap?

Interestingly, there is a more direct connection between JFK’s peccadilloes and the MI5-manipulated Profumo affair. During the summer of 1963, Hoover’s porous sex files began leaking again, resulting in press reports that a high U.S. official had slept with two members of Britain’s Ward-Keeler sex ring, the very ring that toppled Profumo. That high U.S. official, no surprise, was the prodigious JFK. Scott observes that “MI5, as Britain’s counterintelligence agency, maintained direct relations with both Hoover in the FBI” and the CIA. Did the Brits help Hoover set up Kennedy for a fall?

Bobby Baker, catalyst of the JFK-Rometsch affair, later boasted that he had in his possession letters from the east Germain woman that could prove embarrassing to the Kennedys, which per Scott, “strengthens the impression of an ongoing, sophisticated blackmail operation” in this nation’s carnal capital.

Perhaps. Or maybe it just proves that in Washington eventually everyone gets screwed.

|